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NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS.

COLERIDGE'S "ANCIENT MARINER."

Those who regard the "Ancient Mariner" as an exhibition of unconscious genius—a mere product of exuberant fancy, weird and thrilling in its effect, exquisite in its versification, but without final end or aim—have but a faint comprehension of the deep, subtle, and peculiar mind from which it emanated. He who could say of himself: "I am by the law of my nature a reasoner. I can take no interest whatever in hearing or saying anything merely as a fact—merely as having happened. I must refer it to something within me before I can regard it with any curiosity or care. I require a reason why the thing is at all, and why it is there and then rather than elsewhere or at another time;" who, at a very premature age, even before his fifteenth year, was deeply interested in metaphysics; and who owned that the faults of language observable in his juvenile poems were mostly owing to the effort he made and was always making to give a poetic coloring to abstract and metaphysical truths, was of all men, least likely, in the prime of his poetical period, to write a mere musical farrago, which, whatever may be said of its rhyme, if taken literally, can scarcely be accredited with a superabundance of reason.

Coleridge had already written a number of his minor poems, besides contributing largely in prose to the "Watchman," which he edited, and had acquired some reputation as a lecturer, when, in 1796, he made the acquaintance of, and shortly after formed a close friendship with, the poet Wordsworth. It was at the beginning of the career of each, and the influence which they exerted upon one another is incalculable. During the following year they entered into an agreement to publish a volume of their joint works, each engaging to treat his subjects after the style which had already become peculiar to him. Wordsworth was to seek to give interest to what is common and usual; in other words, to treat those subjects which are generally considered as more especially belonging to prose; Coleridge was to give to the weird and improbable a charm which was to spring from the truth of the feeling rather than from the truth of the inci-

dent portrayed. The volume appeared in 1798, and contained, among other poems by Coleridge, the subject of our sketch.

That the poem fully meets the demand which the author made upon himself will scarcely be questioned. The feeling is undoubtedly true. We are convinced that, under the circumstances, one could not have felt otherwise or suffered less than did the Mariner; but the circumstance, or rather the cause of the train of circumstances, is so slight (a man kills an albatross—a bird—and for that act he and all his comrades—a whole ship's crew—suffer the most unspeakable horrors of body and of mind which he, the offender, alone survives) that it could never, despite its almost unapproachable rhythm, exert the fascination it does if we did not feel that the thin tissue of its fable concealed a deeper meaning; that the whole poem is merely a symbol, which is all that a work of art can ever be, of a higher truth.

Only a short time before the "Ancient Mariner" was written, Wordsworth read Coleridge some cantos of his then unedited poem upon the growth of an individual mind ("The Prelude"). Coleridge was enthusiastic in its praise, and besought him to continue and expand it, making, at the same time, some suggestions as to how it should be done. We quote Coleridge's account, to be found in his "Table Talk": "Then the plan laid out and I believe partly suggested by me was, that Wordsworth should assume the station of a man in mental repose—one whose principles were made up and prepared to deliver upon authority a system of philosophy. He was to treat man as man—a subject of eye, ear, touch, and taste—in contact with external nature, and informing the senses from the mind, and not compounding a mind out of the senses; then he was to describe the pastoral and other states of society, assuming something of the Juvenalian spirit as he approached the high civilization of cities and towns, and opening a melancholy picture of the present state of degeneracy and vice; thence he was to infer and reveal the proof of and necessity for the whole state of man and society, being subject to and illustrative of a redemptive process in operation, showing how this idea reconciled all the anomalies, and promised future glory and restoration. Something of this sort was, I think, agreed on. It is, in substance, what I have been all my life doing in my system of philosophy."

Wordsworth never executed the project, but we believe Coleridge did in a measure. The thought, in its passage through the alembic of his fervid imagination, took upon itself something of a personal

character, and he has given us the development, not of the race, but of the individual; he has shown us the "macrocosm in the microcosm." What all his life he labored to execute, and for which, for lack of constructive ability, all his genius and all his labor availed him naught—to erect a system of Christian philosophy—we believe he accomplished in his twenty-fifth year, when he wrote the "Ancient Mariner."

It was the author's intention, in our opinion, to present the Fall from the innocence of ignorance, from the immediacy of natural faith; and the return, through the mediation of sin and doubt, to conscious virtue and belief. Regarded in this light, the poem may be said to have a two-fold character: it may be considered either in a universal or in a particular sense—the Ancient Mariner may represent Life or a life. In either case he offers to the passer-by, selected on account of his fitness to hear, his receptivity, a view of the "terrible discipline of culture" through which man must pass in order to reach self-consciousness and self-determination.

"It is an ancient mariner, and he stoppeth *one* of three." Not to all men is it given to behold the solution of life's deepest problem: "Many are called, but few are chosen." But him to whom, even for a moment, the Eternal Verities are once unveiled, the wedding-feast—the pleasure and profit of mere worldly existence—calls in vain. Strive as he may, "he cannot choose but hear" the voice of his own soul.

"The ship was cheered, the harbor cleared." Man, with all his weakness and all his power, with all his potentialities for good and evil, commences the voyage of life. The journey is bravely begun, childhood and youth pass brightly and cheerily, till, "over the mast at noon," maturity is reached. No specific time is intended. The terms childhood and youth apply to the period of unconsciousness, of the utter indifference of the Me and Not-me; when the Me begins to be conscious of its existence through the pressure upon it of the Not-me, maturity is reached, at whatever age. It is not our intention to dwell upon the consummate art which the poem displays, but we find it difficult altogether to avoid calling attention to the beauty, especially when it also represents the adequacy of its form. Mark, at this point, how significant is the pause which allows time to present the final relinquishment on the part of the wedding-guest of all thought of escape; whatever interruption he makes henceforth is in the interest of the narrative, and betrays its control over him; he no longer seeks to retard or dismiss it. A point of departure is also

reached, the preparation is complete, and the motive may now make itself felt. It is the tightening of the belt as the race begins.

"And now the storm-blast came." The world, with its buffets, its sorrow, and care, its wild-beast struggle for mere existence, confronts him. In his horror and fear, he looks wildly around in search of such sympathy and comfort from his fellows as he needs and thinks he shall surely find, only to discover each chased by the same inexorable necessity, and powerless or too utterly lost in his own affairs to afford him aid. Baked of human help he "grows wondrous cold," and is about to perish when faith in a higher than human sympathy—the albatross—crosses his path to save and bless him. For a time the bird brings peace, but only for a time. In a wanton moment, scarce knowing what he does, he strikes the blow by which he loses sight and consciousness of the spiritual—the true sin against the Holy Ghost, which, if persisted in, shall not be forgiven.

Why does he kill the bird? This is the question of questions. It is the problem of Original Sin. Man is, by nature, evil, and his first conscious, merely natural act, is necessarily a sin against the spiritual. He is then in a state of negation. Spirit is too strong not to resist the natural impulse, and thereon commences the battle between good and evil, which must either end in the putting under foot of the natural, in the negating of the negation, or man dies like the beasts that perish. The conflict is the appointed task of man. Each man must of himself work out his own redemption; he must himself prepare the way for that regeneration which is the promised victory over sin and death.

At first the nature of the man recoils before this daring act of the will. "Ah, wretch! said they, the bird to slay." But when the mist and fog of ignorance and unconsciousness disappear at the approach of the glorious sun of knowledge which now arises, "nor dim, nor red, like God's own head," all fear is forgotten, and in a burst of exultation the cry changes: "'Twas right, said they, such birds to slay, that bring the fog and mist." Man has now become as a god, knowing good and evil, and the ship rushes blithely on. Suddenly its course is stayed: "The breeze dropt down, the sails dropt down, 'twas sad as sad could be." Knowledge is not sufficient; man must not only *know*, but *do*. He has lost view of the spiritual, and the natural alone cannot content him. He has lost his faith, and with it hope and the power to labor, for the right faith of man not only brings him tranquillity, but helps him to do his work.

A fearful calm follows; life is at a standstill. To add to his

misery, he beholds on all sides aspirations, hopes, endeavors, and beliefs ; but none which he can make his own. He is isolated and despairing. "There is water, water everywhere, nor any drop to drink." The world around him seems content with a happiness which holds no charm for him. Its pursuit of fame, of wealth, of pleasure, does not allure him. It appears to hold no thought of a conflict such as is wasting him ; it lives at ease, encompassed, as he thinks, with wonders and terrors. He grows to distrust its fair outside ; the evil within him drives him to see evil in all without him ; the world is the shadow of himself, and as such he fears and suspects it. "The very deep did rot." "Yea, slimy things with legs did crawl upon the slimy sea." Still, even this madness has its lucid intervals. "Some in dreams assured were of the spirit that plagued us so ;" and there are times when he has a glimpse that his torment is not a useless and vain torture ; that there can be no victory without a battle. He has an intuition of the two elements which are at war within him ; he feels that there will be no peace until the spiritual conquers. But he has no power and sees no means by which to assist himself. He is sunk and lost in self—mere finite subjectivity. He makes one effort, but it is in the wrong direction : he will conform to the world and its law. The cross—the emblem of true and living faith—is removed from his neck, and the albatross—the dead faith of creeds and rituals—takes its place.

There is, there can be, no peace in a mere outward conformance to customs that are dead to us ; there may be stillness, but there is no serenity. Nothing has changed ; the ship is still becalmed ; all is weariness and distaste. "There passed a weary time, a weary time." The "glazed and weary eye" wanders listlessly toward the west ; the moody and miserable mind of man peers hopelessly and indifferently into the future, and sees a "something in the sky." He watches it, carelessly at first, then more and more eagerly, until at last it assumes proportion and a shape. The final stage of his "temptation in the wilderness" is reached. At last he has discovered a solution to his problem : he will negate the spiritual ; he will fall down and worship the evil one, and he will be saved, and all the glory of the world shall be given unto him. The thought fills him with a horrible joy, and he calls up his whole being to rejoice in the promised deliverance. His cry, "A sail, a sail !" is answered by a "grin" of joy. "The western wave was all aflame," the future now is glorious with earthly promise, "when the strange shape drove suddenly betwixt us and the sun."

With horror he discovers that it is only a skeleton bark. No kindly, helpful hands are extended from its side to aid him ; the only companion of Unbelief is Death—here and hereafter. The game has been played ; Unbelief has won the will of man ; Death claims his other faculties, and darkness and fear envelope him. To doubt the All is to doubt himself, and this, the worst of unbeliefs, now fastens upon him. “One after one, by the star-dogged moon,” every aspiration and noble desire, every power and every purpose, “with heavy thump, a lifeless lump,” drops down and perishes, only turning ere they die to curse his negligence to use, or worse, his abuse of them.

“Alone, alone, all, all alone, alone on a wide, wide sea !” The suffering soul of man in the wide expanse, in the crowded immensity of the world, is isolated by its agony in that Gethsemane where the best beloved are left behind, and the bare spirit goes up alone to meet and wrestle with its Maker. And oh ! the horror, the shrinking, the bloody sweat of it all ! The grace and beauty of life have departed, and only a sickening sense of guilt and wretchedness, of bitter self-loathing and self-disgust remains : “A thousand, thousand slimy things lived on ; and so did I.”

“I looked upon the rotting sea”—the world which is his shadow, upon which he has projected his Me—“and drew my eyes away !” “I looked upon the rotting deck”—his own inner consciousness—“and there the dead men lay.” “I looked to Heaven,” but his unbelief has closed that to his prayer. “I closed my lids and kept them closed,” but he cannot shut out the view, “for the sky and the sea, the sea and the sky”—doubt of all around and of all above him—“lay like a load on my weary eye, and the dead”—doubt in himself—“were at my feet !” The talent which the lord of the country gave to his laborer to keep for him has been returned, and he hears the well-earned sentence : “Take, therefore, the talent from him, and cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness.” The lowest deep is reached. On this plane there is no more to suffer or to know. Hell is sounded.

This is the culmination of the poem ; no higher point, no greater misery is possible. It has been gradually, but powerfully and tempestuously, working up to its climax, and now the change is marked, truly and unmistakably, by the altered movement. Hitherto the transitions have all been sudden, the epithets harsh, and the tone hard and rebellious. The stars have “rushed out ;” the breeze “dropt down ;” “at one stride” came the dark. We have had

“glittering eyes” and “bright” eyes and looks that were “fire ;” the “bloody sun,” the “broad and burning sun.” The moon has been “horned” and “star-dogged.” Now :

“The moving moon went up the sky,
And nowhere did abide ;
Softly she was going up,
And a star or two beside.”

The wild tempest of passion and revolt has raged itself out ; the warring elements have become quiet from sheer exhaustion. Wrapped in this momentary calm, man now finds time to look away from self and cast his eyes outward. “*Beyond* the shadow of the ship, I watched the water-snakes.” Now that his desire for the earthly has perished, the world is transfigured. All its horror, its wickedness, its coldness, have vanished. It is no longer a “den of lies ;” no longer a “charnel-house,” for over and through it rushes the eternal stream of life, and power, and purpose. His hard destiny has crushed out of him all warm and hopeful life, but at the same time it has purified him of all particularity. “*Within* the shadow of the ship, I watched their rich attire.” Gradually he grows to feel himself a part of this transcendent movement, and, as the persuasion gains upon him, each particular aim and thought, each selfish purpose and desire, seems poorer and more trivial to his view, till, in a rush of love and humility, he bows his stubborn head ; “I blessed them unaware.”

“The self-same moment I could pray.” The first renunciation of self has been accomplished, and now heaven and its glory open upon his adoring gaze. In his worship, man renounces his particular aims and interests ; appealing to the Absolute as absolute, he becomes conscious of their union and his subordination. With the knowledge that the subjective and objective will are one, he attains his freedom : “The albatross fell off, and sank like lead into the sea.”

He no longer feels himself a being lonely and apart. He has united himself with the All—making the union his own act by accepting and agreeing with it, by becoming conscious of it—he feels that he is free, because he feels that the necessity, too, is his. In this full confidence he dismisses every private fear and anxiety, and sinks into a healing repose : “The gentle sleep from heaven, that slid into my soul.” But contemplation, even of the Highest, is not the true destiny of man. His slumber calms and soothes him, but it is of short duration—the need for action soon returns. He awakes to find that the time, which had seemed to be passing so eventlessly, has not

been lost. During its wise silence "the great rain of his strength, which sweepeth away ill-set foundations," has been falling, and it has brought him strength and comfort; he is still wretched and self-distrustful, but he has gained power and patience to endure. He has cast himself into the stream of being, and he is now irresistibly floated onward: "The loud wind never reached the ship, but now the ship moved on." The great and triumphant effort has been made. Man has willed, purely and decidedly, the good; and now the stream of goodness flows in upon him.

The dead faculties are aroused by the same impulse: "Beneath the lightning and the moon, the dead men gave a groan." They perform their accustomed tasks, but in an unconscious way: "They raised their limbs like lifeless tools." The old activity, the old sentient volition has not returned; "'Twas not those souls that fled in pain, that to their corse came again, but a troop of spirits blest."

In his abrogation of self, man has entirely sunk all individuality; practical effort is abandoned, and he lives in the theoretical alone. From an unconscious immersion in the objective, he passed over into the particular phase, in which he went so far as to deny it—the objective—all validity. In this process he attained a consciousness which assisted in his restoration. He knows now that the objective and subjective are one, but knows it only in such a way that the objective is that one, and that in it the subjective is absorbed. His return is into the realm of Abstract Universality, an universality which subjugates the individual and denies all his personal aims. But God himself as Absolute Subjectivity involves the element of particularity, and, therefore, the particular or personal part of man, although on the merely natural side a something to be denied or overcome, on the spiritual or spiritualized natural is a something to be preserved and honored: "It is in the world that spirit is to be realized."

The power of the spirit, which "under the keel, nine fathoms deep," had "made the ship to go," has brought him thus far; it is now time to supplement grace by works: "The sails at noon left off their tune, and the ship stood still also." The new insight which recalls him to the world seems for a moment to loosen the band which binds him to the spiritual. But spirit is itself that band, and "in a moment she 'gan stir, with short uneasy motion."

Now the old movement, on an advanced plane, is duplicated; he passes over into the antithesis again. But this is a concreter phase; a conflict is unavoidable, because it is the sphere of the negative, but

the old spirit of revolt is cancelled. Man now is not only willing but anxious to do his work ; he is only uncertain as to what that work may be, and whether he is worthy to perform it. Tossed backward and forward by conflicting emotions, and finally overcome by their violence, he sinks into a lethargy. The body is inactive, but the soul is not asleep. It is a council chamber in which a debate is being carried on between doubt (not the old doubt of all things, but doubt of himself, his right to recognition, knowing himself to be chief among guilty sinners, he doubts his call to “preach Christ and him crucified”) and the new insight which teaches him that to every man to whom the power is given belongs the right, to every man who has won the victory the triumph is due : “I heard, and in my soul discerned, two voices in the air.”

The first voice asks : “Is it he ? Is this the man ?”—who killed the albatross. Is it he who has cast aside, who has destroyed his natural faith, and thus estranged the unconscious spirit of childlike humility and ignorance : “The spirit who bideth by himself in the land of mist and snow ;” is it for him who has suffered all the misery of doubt and denial, who has barely been rescued from utter destruction, to imagine that he has any worth in himself—that his subjectivity has any claim to personality ?

The second voice answers : “The man hath penance done.” The sin is condoned, for it has been cancelled. Man turned away from the spiritual, it is true ; but he has returned, richer and better for the lapse, for it has won him consciousness—“And penance more will do.” Sin is no positive thing ; it is the disharmony, the drawing apart, the sundering of the attributes of the human soul—pure negativity. Every negative action is followed by its own punishment ; the doer is surrounded by the atmosphere of his deed ; and until “the mortal puts on immortality” man’s life is bound to be a succession of penances. Innocence is effortless ; it is spontaneity ; virtue is a perpetual struggle. The great distinction between the wicked and the righteous lies in the fact that the fallen human will is in absolute bondage and helplessness, while the righteous man, by his continual struggle, is able to negate his negativity as it arises, to perform for himself the function of negative unity—he is freely self-determined.

“What makes the ship drive on so fast—what is the ocean doing ?” But why is this man being now so irresistibly floated onward—what part has the world in his progress ? The last question is answered first : “Still as a slave before his lord, the ocean hath no blast.” “His great, bright eye most silently up to the moon is

cast." Far above all finite differences and determinations, the eternally Positive gazes down upon the world which he at the same time fills and governs—of which he is at once process and product—graciously looking upon his *reflection*; but seeing no sin, and hiding his face from the wicked because they *are not*—to him; forever accomplishing the purpose which he forever designs—the realization of himself in the self-consciousness of the "creature." The first voice asks again: "But why drives on the ship so fast, without or wave or wind?" "The air is cut away before and closes from behind." In the realm of the merely natural, God's freedom is shown in the law of necessity. In the world of spirit man's freedom is God's necessity. When man strives with a single heart to attain truth, by the necessity of his nature, God must will that he shall succeed.

"Fly, brother, fly." "For slow and slow that ship must go when the mariner's trance is abated." Between the theoretical and the practical—the thought, the creation of the intellect and the actual performance—how wide, how well-nigh impassable a gulf!

"I woke." "The dead men stood together." One more backward glance which takes in the whole of the wasted past, and then "this spell was snapt, once more I viewed the ocean green." He is done now and forever with all enervating regret; he leaves to the past its dead; the present claims him. He ceases to think of what he has been, and tries to resolve what he shall be; but, still "in fear and dread," the new path is all untried, and his past errors have deprived him of confidence. "Soon there breathed a wind o'er me:" tribulation has taught him patience, and "patience worketh experience, and experience *hope*."

"Oh, dream of joy!" "Is this mine own countree?" The true self-return of human activity is accomplished. Freed from all prepossessions, he returns into himself, prepared to start anew in his circling movement. He has returned from whence he started, but with what a rich cargo of experience! As he nears his home, as he looks more closely into his own consciousness, he discerns the true meaning of the conflict in which he has been engaged. "Each corse, lay flat, lifeless and flat." Known now in its true relation, as the blank page on which spirit writes its history, the power of the natural is at an end. "A man all light, a seraph man, on every corse there stood." Man no longer supposes himself to be possessed of single and particular faculties, attributes, and powers, for he sees that spirit informs them all with its unity. The soul of man emits its own light, and serves him as "signals to the land."

"But soon I heard the dash of oars, I saw a boat appear." The Hermit—the new faith which is no longer blind, but blessed with insight, which is now *belief*—comes to "wash away the albatross's blood." As the "skiff-boat" nears the ship the "lights, so many and fair," disappear. Spirit is only visible in the moment of activity. To the outer world the nature of the regenerated man looks "warped ;" his faculties "thin and sere." The inner struggle has marred the outer man for those who see no beauty save in perfection of form and delicacy of tint.

"The boat came close beneath the ship, and straight a sound was heard." The time has come for man to make an objective assertion of personality. He is equal to the moment. He allows all finite things to fall away. "The ship went down like lead," and the infinite, the soul—the essential part of man—rises alone to the surface : "Like one who hath been seven days drowned, my body lay afloat." He has died to the world, and been born anew even in this life. To mere sensuous knowing and finite understanding, the Pilot and the Pilot's boy, the change is superhuman ; they cannot fathom it, and the appearance fills them with terror : "The pilot shrieked and fell down in a fit." "The pilot's boy who now doth crazy go." But the true faith—the Hermit—which is Reason, investigates. He asks : "What manner of man art thou ?"

"And now, all in my own countree, I stood on the firm land." The circle is complete, he has found himself, the return through the object to subject is accomplished. He has hearkened to the lesson : Neither shall ye say, lo here ! or lo there ! for behold, the kingdom of God is within you."

"At an uncertain hour that agony returns." The necessity for negation of the finite may often return, but man has now learned the potent spell, and the old depths of misery need never again be sounded. "I pass like night from land to land ; I have strange powers of speech." Go now whithersoever he must, he will never again leave his home, for he carries it with him—he is at home with himself. He has ceased to regard inaction as the highest good ; ceased to distrust his own worth ; ceased to struggle with his destiny. He accepts the work and the place appointed him ; and, in fulfilling all necessary actions at the same time that he abrogates all merely selfish interests, feels that he commands the universe. In acknowledging necessity he affirms his freedom.

"O, wedding-guest ! this soul hath been alone on a wide, wide sea." Wrapped in finite selfhood, he saw nothing of the beauty and

glory around and above him, and, faint with self-weariness, his heavy gaze saw not the ineffable image within. Tried seven times by fire, all particularity now has vanished, and he has been given to feel the bliss which flows from the union of each with all, and all with each. "'Tis sweeter far to me to walk together to the kirk," "And all together pray." He has found that prayer—the soliloquy of the beholding soul when its unity with God has become apparent, and by which that unity is perpetuated—is the only happiness.

"He prayeth best who loveth best." He rises most nearly to the height of that union who comprehends it, whether he, through belief and love and lowly listening feels it, or, by the piercing power of reason, knows it. "For, the dear God who loveth us, He made and loveth all." The subjective in absorbing all—in making it its own—in loving it—becomes all. Subject and Object in one—true Universal.

"A sordid, solitary thing,
'Mid countless brethren with a lonely heart,
Through courts and cities the smooth Savage roams,
Feeling himself, his own low Self, the whole;
When he by sacred sympathy might make
The whole one Self! Self that no alien knows!
Self, far diffused as fancy's wing can travel!
Self, spreading still! Oblivious of its own,
Yet all of all possessing! this is Faith!
This the Messiah's destined victory."*

GERTRUDE GARRIGUES.

St. Louis, January, 1880.

* COLERIDGE. "*Religious Musings*."—Written December 24, 1794.

AT THOREAU'S CAIRN, WALDEN WOODS, 1879.

No more shall summer's heat or winter's cold,
Nor autumn plague, nor rule of greedy gold
Show thee heroic in an alien world;
Thy track above men's earth-bound minds was hurled,
As some stars roll their circuit out of sight;
Their course we see not, but we see the light.
For all the customs of our social state
Which easy homage gain and fix our fate,
Thy finer spirit felt a native dread;
Yet questioned it no further than there led
Some certain lamp to light the daily life.
But thought ran on beyond the narrow strife,
Foretelling wiser days and more benign;
In those shall sound no greater name than thine.

JOHN ALBEE.

NEWCASTLE, N. H., September 17, 1879.